

**Abstract   April 18, 2012**  
**The Coconino National Forest/Hopi Tribe Repatriation Project:**  
**A Status Report**

By

Anna Berg, Museum of Northern Arizona,  
and Peter J. Pilles, Jr., Coconino National Forest

with contributions by

Craig Johnson, Coconino National Forest  
Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, Hopi Tribe  
Arleyn Simon, Arizona State University  
Kim Spurr, Museum of Northern Arizona  
Frank Wozniak, USFS Southwest Regional Office

The Coconino National Forest/Hopi Repatriation Project is one of the largest repatriations in the United States. It is estimated that there are almost 3,000 human remains and 5,000 associated and unassociated funerary objects that will be repatriated to the Hopi Tribe and reburied over a four-year period. In consultation with the Hopi Tribe and the Pueblo of Zuni, two repatriations/reburials have been completed, and we have learned much on how to manage a project of this magnitude. Our approach to resolving the many challenges posed by the project may be of use to other institutions involved with similar NAGPRA projects.

Arizona State University, the Museum of Northern Arizona, and The Arizona State Museum, house most of the materials, but additional remains and artifacts are scattered throughout various institutions across the country. One sobering fact that has emerged is that existing documentation of human remains and artifacts at virtually all institutions is inadequate, both from a simple inventory perspective as well as for accurate and adequate scientific documentation.

Given the scale of this enterprise, a diverse group of specialists has been called upon to accomplish the task. Over 60 archaeologists, administrators, curatorial staff, bioarchaeologists, and traditional religious practitioners are involved in the project. This presentation will examine the role that each group is playing in the project, lessons learned, benefits realized, challenges faced, and how they have been resolved. Key to the process has been developing a team approach that includes all involved parties, preparing a set of guidelines and procedures, and estimating more time to complete documentation than originally planned. Formalized guidelines ensure consistency of documentation and rationales for decisions concerning locating unidentified human remains in bulk collections and reuniting isolated bone with existing individuals. Other challenges met along the way include funding, coordination, reconciling opposing viewpoints, and locating a site that ensures the reburials will not be disturbed and that meet traditional expectations.

We have found our NAGPRA repatriation project to be emotionally charged for all parties, but besides its many challenges, it has resulted in various benefits to all. It has provided an opportunity to improve the completeness and accuracy of existing records, improve awareness of the needs and expectations of all parties, and increase sensitivity for traditional Pueblo values.